

SCOTTISH BALLADS.

"Popular poetry is that which has had its origin among and has emanated from the people, which has been animated by its joys, watered by its tears, and which then returning again as it were to soil whence it was drawn has largely influenced its character" - so says an able writer, and it would appear that poetry or a metrical form of composition has always been adopted in rude ages, as the best mode for transmitting story or legend from one generation to another. Ballads may be described as short narrative poems, each celebrating some real or fancied event, and suitable for singing or chanting to some simple natural melody. They often are but ought not to be confounded with songs, which properly speaking are the more polished and artistic form of sentiment, expression, or even of description. An incident communicated in prose may be traditionally preserved and transmitted with tolerable correctness as regards the facts, but not so as regards the language, each successive narrator telling the story in his own way and using his own words - but a metrical tale is framed for the express purpose that the words themselves may be transmitted, not only the story but/

but the words of the story are to be handed down; ballads may therefore be reasonably regarded as the very earliest form of literary composition.

In this metrical form our ballads have come down to us from generation to generation and in them we read the history of the people. Their authors were most probably part minstrels part gaberlunzies, who wandered about the kingdom haunting fairs, markets and all assemblies of the people, catching up the events of the time as they transpired, and describing them in verse; they were favoured men and were gladly welcomed wherever they went, always fortunate to procure a meal and a couch of straw, paying their lawing with a song, then forward on the morrow.

Of nearly every old traditionary ballad known, there exists what may be called different versions, or in other words, the same story is told after a different fashion in one district of the country from what it is in another - both narrate the same story, but do not precisely tally in their texts, perhaps they may not have a single stanza which is mutual property, but this is not surprising, seeing that these compositions were not till a comparatively recent period preserved by printing, living therefore on the lips and in the memories of several generations and sung extensively over the country, where/

where even at the present day, every district almost has a dialect locally peculiar. Different versions are easily accounted for.- When a minstrel met a brother of the craft, they would in all probability exhibit their stock in trade and thereby acquire fresh material - the meeting over and reciting his novelties in a distant part of the country, the singer who could not afford to pause in his strain, would hardly hesitate to thrust into the gap any set of stanzas, which without outrage to the story carried along with it the feelings of his audience; with this kind of joint-stock of ideas which existed among the old balladists, it is idle then to quarrel over the origin and authorship of the ballads; sufficient it is that we have the wares themselves, which tell us so much of the life fact and fiction of the olden time.

In the days when these ballads were written, there were no books for the people to read, no newspapers, no long lectures to listen to; the ballads were the only intellectual incentives they possessed and into these ballads therefore would be infused the elements the people most needed, - they were as we learn from them, descriptive of human emotions, the tale of unhappy love, the mystic songs of fairyland, and of the young knight slain in foreign field, or they described the raid, the seige, the high and heroic war chant and the deeds/

deeds of chivalrous enterprize. Many of these ballads were smart on churchmen and on barons too; many were the local allusions which glanced in satire and indignation through the verses; probably no sermons preached in the district had half the value of many of these simple songs. They were the great sources of popular life and interest, and hence the favour with which the minstrel was received from the hall of the baron to the hut of the peasant.

Scottish Ballads may be principally divided into two classes, Historical and Romantic - the former founded on historical events which had happened in recent or remote times and of which there is some authentic record. The second class, viz. Romantic, are those which though possessing all the features of real interest, and probably originating in fact, cannot now after the lapse of so many ages be with certainty traced to any historical source. Under this class also may be placed all those which treat of incredible achievements, strange adventures by flood and field, and occasionally pour a brief but intense glare of light over the dim realms of doubt and dread of former days.

Let me notice first, as they are most easily dealt with, a few of the historical ballads. They contain perhaps the finest poetry and the deepest pathos of the two classes.

The/

The subjects of these are national or personal conflicts, family feuds, public or domestic transactions, personal adventure or local incidents which in some shape or other have fallen under the observation of contemporary and authentic annalists - in general these compositions may be considered as coeval with the events which they commemorate.

The fine old ballad of Sir Patrick Spens has always been accepted as ancient and authentic, though critics are by no means agreed as to the actual occurrence of which it has preserved the tradition. Some say that the circumstance of the voyage and disastrous shipwreck is to be connected with the bringing home of the Maid of Norway the grand daughter of Alexander III who inherited the crown of Scotland at his death. Others think that it refers to the marriage of Alexander's daughter Margaret to Eric King of Norway, whether she was conducted with a splendid retinue. The latter I think is the correct one as it is quite evident from the context of the ballad that the mission of Sir Patrick Spens, whatever it may have been, was accomplished when he reached Norway, and that it records the melancholy and sad fate of the gallant band on their voyage back to this country. This "grand old ballad" as it is styled by Coleridge has been universally praised and is/

is familiar, beginning.-

The King sits in Dunfermline town,
 Drinking the bluid-red wine:
 "Oh, where will I get a gude skipper
 To sail this ship of mine?"

passing such graphic touches of description as.-

I saw the new moon, late yestreen,
 With the auld moon in her arm;
 And if we gang to sea, master,
 I fear we'll come to harm".

or

"He hadna sailed a league a league,
 A league but barely three;
 When the lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud
 And gurly grew the sea;"

attention be drawn to its magnificent close.-

"O lang lang may the ladyes sit
 Wi' their fans into their hand
 Before they see Sir Patrick Spens
 Come sailing to the strand."

"And lang lang may the maidens sit
 Wi' their gowd kames in their hair
 Awaiting for their ain dear loves.
 For them they'l see nae mair."

"O! forty miles off Aberdour,
 'Tis fifty fathoms deep;
 And there lies gude Sir Patrick Spens,
 Wi' the Scots lords at his feet:

Whoever he was, the nameless and unknown author of this old ballad was a poet, and a great one too.

"The Battle of Otterburn" and the English "Chevy Chase" are versions from the opposite sides of one event, round which an undying interest has gathered, ^{and} aptly illustrates the nature and special characteristics of popular poetry, - As a border contest in which the rivalry and hatred of the two nations was evinced in its deadliest form, it commended itself alike to the minstrels on either side of the border, and it may be noted as a fine borderer's trait, that each of the two ballads does full justice to the chivalry and fighting mettle of the enemy. It was a gallantly contested action, fought out for mere fighting's sake between the bravest warriors of two brave people the Douglas' and the Percys and ended in the death of Earl Douglas on the one side, and Percy being led away captive on the other.

"When Percy wi' the Douglas met,
 I wat they were full fain;
 They swakked their swords till sair they swet,
 And the blood ran doon like rain;

.....

This deed was done at Otterburn
 About the breaking o' the day,
 Earl Douglas was buried at the bracken bush,
 And the Percy led captive away;

Nothing, at least in Scottish eyes, can surpass the simple
 majesty and pathos of the last words of Douglas.:-

"My nephew good" the Douglas said,
 What recks the death o' ane?
 Last night I dreamed a dreary dream,
 And I ken the day's thy ain.

"O bury me by the bracken bush,
 Beneath the blooming brier;
 Let never living mortal ken
 A kindly Scot lies here;

The historical ballad of Border chivalry touches its highest
 and strongest note in these words.

The ballad of 'The Battle of Harlaw' gives a minute account
 of the circumstances which gave rise to it, as well as of the
 progress and issue of the battle, fought under the Regency of
 the Duke of Albany on 24th July 1411, near the village of Harlaw
 in Aberdeenshire, between Donald, Lord of the Isles and the
 Earl of Mar. The result of this contest, really between the
 Highlanders/

Highlanders of the North West and the Lowlanders of the East of Scotland, secured the permanent and undoubted supremacy of the Lowlanders. The Lord of the Isles was totally defeated and the next year in terms of a treaty he gave up all claims to the Earldom of Ross and delivered hostages for his future better behaviour. As it ended the struggle for the mastery between Highlands and Lowlands, it was a landmark and turning point in the history and poetry of those provinces as Bannockburn and Flodden were in the South - the conclusion of the ballad is very graphic.-

"There was not since King Kenneth's days,
 Sic strange intestine cruel strife;
 In Scotland seen, as ilk man says.
 There mony liklie lost their life;
 Which made divorce twene man and wife,
 And mony children fatherless.
 Which in this realm, has been full rife;
 Lord help these lands; our wrangs redress.

.....

In July, on St James his even,
 That four-and-twenty dismal day;
 Twelve hundred, ten score, and eleven,
 Of years, since Christ, the suthe to say;
 Men will remember as they may
 When this the veritie they know,
 And mony a ane, may mourn for aye,
 The grim battle of the Harelaw."

"Wight Wallace", "The Douglas Tragedy", "The Outlaw Murray", "Sir James the Rose", "The Battle of Bothwell Brig" and "Hardyknute" of which Sir Walter Scott said.- "It is the first ballad I ever learnt, the last I shall ever forget", all belong to the Historical Class, but as time will not permit to quote at length, and short extracts give such a poor idea of the ballads I do not do so at all.

We now come to the next class of ballads, viz. the Romantic, which are more interesting, much more varied in character and exhibit more of true and unaffected nature. They attend more closely to the business in hand, some of them rude and bustling, and not unfrequently enlivened by flashes of savage humour, - in every verse you seem to hear the clatter of hoof and the rattle of steel jackets; they throw a light on a condition of man which can never recur in these islands - all that far off lawless and generous life is unroofed to us in these ballads, we wander among the relics of a past society and in reading them we see what we have gained and lost in the course of a few centuries, and what new elements have entered into human life.

The first thing that attracts our notice in the Romantic ballad is their direct and impulsive life, be the subject of the narrative what it may, the action of the piece commences at once; there is no unnecessary waste of words, no laying of colour above colour to give brilliancy to the picture, no turning back to mend what/

what has been said amiss. The story runs on in an arrow-like stream with all the straight forwardness of unfeigned and earnest passion, and is always clearly and impressively told. Another striking and never failing feature of these compositions, is their always agreeing in describing certain actions in one uniform way; their identity of language and expression in numerous scenes where the least resemblance of incident occurs, in many of them there are great similarities of incident and feeling, there are also certain endings of final verses, which the minstrels might employ at pleasure, always with good taste, often with exquisite effect. What phrases are more familiar, more infused with the magic of the ballad-spirit than the "wan water", the "bent sae brown" the "lee licht o' the mune"? When the Knight rides forth to see his true love, he mounts his "berry brown steed" and fares "o'er hill and dale" until he comes to the castle wa', where the lady sits "sewing her silken seam". He kisses her "cheek and chin" and she "kilts her green kirtle" and follows him. One thing at least seldom fails the reader - when two lovers die they are of course buried together and out of the grave of one there springs a rose, and out of the grave of the other a brier, such as.-

"They buried him in Saint Mary's Kirk,
 And her in Saint Mary's Quire;
 And out of her grave grew a bonnie red rose,
 And out of the Knight's a brier;"

"And they twa met and they twa plait,
 As fain they wad be near;
 And a' the world might ken right well
 They were twa lovers dear;"

The rose and the brier growing rapidly contrive as a sort of poetical justice to interlace and marry their branches, proving that "in death they are not divided", a spectacle which would now-a-days attract little attention, but which seems to have had the most touching associations for the grim moss-trooper and the lawless riever of the Marches. Then again when a lover comes to his true love's bower, he uniformly makes use of but one argument to gain admittance

"O rise, O rise, Lady Margerie
 O rise and let me in,
 For the rain, rains on my yellow hair
 And the dew draps on my chin."

and much to the credit of the tender heart within, we seldom find that the shivering gallant was long excluded, for as the minstrel has it

"With her feet as white as sleet,
 She strode her bower within;
 And with her fingers lang and sma'
 She loot sweet Willie in".

Dr Sam Johnson, that great autocrat of literature, who had

no great liking for Scotland or the Scotch, had a contempt for ballad verses, and it was mainly on this uniformity of phraseology in describing incidents of a similar nature that he attacked them; he protested they might be manufactured by the yard without any previous deliberation - thus

"I put my hat upon my head,
And walked into the Strand;
And there I met another man,
With his hat into his hand;"

or

"The tender infant meek and mild
Fell down upon a stone
The nurse took up the squalling child
But still the child squalled on".

This paragraph is perhaps out of place in a paper such as this. I just mention it to show the difference between Dr Johnson's stuff, and the spirit of the old ballads, the very baldest of which are touching and irresistible.

Many of the Romantic ballads have been produced by scenes and incidents connected with the life and story of the Border Country. The whole district is full of associations, every stream has its traditions, every glen is peopled by legends, every ruin is consecrated by a story of love or revenge. This region + so peaceful now, was in the olden time one great theatre of strife/

strife and bloodshed. It was the battle field of the Percy and the Douglas - to quote the old chronicle -

"There never was a time on the March partes
 Sen the Douglas and the Percy met
 But yt was marvel, and the redde blude run out
 As the rane does in the strete"

It was the land of the Kers, Scotts, Humes, Armstrongs and other border clans, who preyed on England, Scotland and on one another with great impartiality. Many of the ballads tell us of the moonlight expeditions that were made into England, how the midnight was reddened by flames from many a border peel and farm steding, how the rough moss-trooper urged a drove of floundering and terrified cattle homewards before him, how the alarm has spread for miles and our "auld enemy" is mounting in haste to pursue the rievvers, how across barren waste and up steep ravine a blood hound is already baying on the track, and before morning there will be many an empty saddle in the troop. Battle is an everyday occurrence and wounds and dislocations are matters of course. Educated in the belief that plunder was the whole duty of man; and revenge the most exalted virtue, the borderer when brought to suffer met his fate with an unfaltering heart - it was a misfortune of course to be hanged, a thing to be avoided if possible - but he could not feel that he was a criminal and for him/

him the gallows had no fear nor shame. The worst of them had courage; they snap their fingers and laugh in the very teeth of death - one of the Armstrongs before he was executed in Edinburgh sang the following

"This night is my departing night,
For here nae langer must I stay;
There's neither friend nor foe o' mine,
But wishes me away;

What I hae done through lack o' wit
I never, never can recall
I hope ye're a' my friends as yet
Good-night and joy be wi' you all."

Hobbie Noble, "the man that lowsed Jock o' the side" with the can of beer at his lips and the rope about his neck, could sing with an approving conscience -

"Now, fare thee well, sweet Mangerton,
For ne'er again I will thee see;
I wad hae betrayed nae man alive
For a' the gowd in Christentie;"

a farewell that reminds us of the Highland reiver, Macpherson, who "so rantingly so dantly" played a spring and danced to it beneath the gallows tree at Banff, crying out the while against "treacherie/

"treacherie" and broke his fiddle across his knee when none of the crowd would take it from his hand.

The ballad of "Jamie Telfer" gives a concise account of one of the forays so common on the Border during the reigns of Queen Mary and James VI. In this case the English were the aggressors and we have a spirited description of a foray and the subsequent pursuit and rescue of the prey. The Captain of Bewcastle had ramshackled Jamie's house and driven off his cattle. The ruined man starts up, leaving "a greeting wife and bairnies three" and runs miles over the snow to summon aid. He alarms peel after peel and the awakened inmates hurry up and push on in hot haste to Branksome Ha' where Buccleuch dwelt in a sort of feudal state. "Wha brings the fray to me" cries the old lord, starting up like a roused lion as they clatter at his gate

"It's I, Jamie Telfer, o' the fair Dodhead,
And a harried man I think I be;
There's nought left in the fair Dodhead
But a greeting wife and bairnies three."

The Duke being thus called upon for aid, summons his retainers to go and help Jamie. A band is soon raised and the chase goes on

"The/

"The Scots they rade, the Scots they ran,
 Sae starklie and sae steadlie;
 And aye the ower word o' the thrang
 Was - "Rise for Branksome readilie!"

As they ride forward their numbers increase and in a short time they come in sight of the Captain of Bewcastle and his men driving the booty straight for England. As was to be expected little time is wasted on words.

"Then tilt they gaed wi' heart and hand,
 The blows flew thick as bickering hail;
 And mony a horse ran masterless;
 And mony a comely cheek was pale;

O mony a horse ran masterless,
 The splintered lances flew on hie;
 But or they were to the Kershope Ford
 The Scots had gotten the Victorie."

Vain was the offer by the Bewcastle raiders to men in such a mood to take back the cattle that had been lifted. They got them back and more.

"When they cam' to the fair Dodhead,
 They were a welcome sight to see;
 For instead of his ain ten milk-kye
 Jamie Telfer has gotten thirty-and-three."

In 1528 James V made a flying visit to the borders under the pretext of hunting, but in reality to execute justice upon delinquents. On this occasion many of the border freebooters were severely dealt with. Johnnie Armstrong a noted personage both in history and tradition, Adam Scott of Tushielaw, called the King of the Border and Cockburn of Henderland were all hanged over the gateways of their own towers. The Borderers were bitterly offended at this freak of the King's, but it seems to have had a wholesome effect and given the freebooters a lesson which they were slow to forget. The following verses from a ballad called "The Border Widow's Lament" seems to have been composed by the wife of Cockburn of Henderland at his death.-

"He slew my knight to me sae dear,
He slew my knight, and poin'd his gear;
My servants all for life did flee,
And left me in extremitie; —

"I sewed his sheet, making my mane,
I watched the corpse myself alane;
I watched his body night and day,
No living creature, came that way;

I took his body on my back,
And whiles I gaed, and whiles I sat;
I digg'd a grave and laid him in,
And happ'd him with the sod sae green;"

What a strange tenderness and pathos there is about the word happ'd. There is something very touching too, in that woman's lonely vigil by the dead in solitude. The language of the ballad is simple as a child's, and the circumstances are related without passion or excitement.

There is an expression of misery such as this which appears frequently in Scottish Ballads. Burns in one of his letters quotes the following lines from an old ballad which he has picked up among the country people. It breathes the same hopeless misery, and pines like it for the rest of the grave.-

'O that my father had ne'er on me smiled,
 O that my mother had ne'er to me sung;
 O that my cradle had never been rocked;
 But that I had died, when I was young.

O that the grave it were my bed!
 My blankets were my winding sheet.
 The clocks and worms my bedfellows a',
 And O! sae sound as I should sleep!"

"What a sigh was there!" Burns adds - "I do not remember in all my reading to have met with anything more truly the language of misery, than the exclamation in the last line. Misery is like love, to speak its language truly the author must have felt it" —

But/

But "Kinmont Willie" is the finest of these Border ballads, remarkable for the daring deed it celebrates, and for the light laughing scorn of danger which it exhibits. The English represented by Lord Scroope have succeeded in capturing Kinmont Willie, a freebooter whose exploits are well known on the border.

"They band his legs beneath the steed
They tied his hands behind his back
They gaurded him five on each side
And they brought him over the Liddell-rack.

They led him through the Liddell-rack,
And also through the Carlisle sands;
They brought him to Carlisle Castel,
To be at my Lord Scroope's commands.

So while Willie lies in the central dungeon, like a wolf in a trap, under a load of clanking chains, with thoughts of the gallows and the gude fellows he is never to see again, intelligence of his capture reaches Buccleuch in Branksome Hall. How the blood of the Border chieftain boils up.

"He has ta'en the table wi' his hand,
He garr'd the red wind, spring on hie;
"Now curses on my head", he cried.
"But avenged o' Lord Scroope I'll be":

"And/

"And have they ta'en him Kinmont Willie
 Against the truce o' Border tide?
 And forgotten that the bauld Buccleuch
 Is keeper here on the Scottish side."

Kinmont Willie is to be delivered, and we have a fine description of the relieving party and of the march to Carlisle. Here is the rescue and conclusion.-

"Wi' coulters and wi' fore hammers,
 We garred the bars gang merrilie;
 Until we cam to the inner prison,
 Where Kinmont Willie he did lie.

Willie is of course in ecstasies at being retaken, and while he is being carried out shoulder high, cries farewell to Lord Scroope and thanks him for his lodging, adding that he would not fail to forget it, the first time they met on the Border side - by this time the city drums were beating, the bells ringing and a beacon lit on the top of the Castle to give warning to the country, but it is of no use they are too late.

"Buccleuch has turned to Eden water
 Even where it flowed frae bank to brim;
 And he has plunged in, wi' a' his band
 And safely swam them through the stream.

He/

He turned him to the other side,
 And at Lord Scroope his glove flung he;
 "If ye like na my visit in Merry England
 In fair Scotland come visit me"; —

Lord Scroope staring after them sore astonished from the waters
 edge exclaims

"He's either himself a devil frae hell
 Or else his mither a witch maun be;
 I wadna' have ridden that wan water;
 For a' the gowd in Christentie."

But all those fierce spirits have stormed themselves out, and
 we learn the stories of their strifes and hatreds, their
 generosities and revenges, their burnings and plunderings from
 the strains of a few wandering and forgotten minstrels.

Up in the North the Romantic ballads of the district are
 in no way behind those of the Border in strength and tenderness;
 they have as much of the "blood red wine" coursing through them
 as those of Tweedside or Cheviot although it may be of a rougher
 style, and if they came later and had a less brilliant flowering
 time, they endured later, they had a fighting border here that
 lasted till the '45. They gather about the family history of
 the/

the great houses planted by Spey, Dee, Don and where Gadie runs by the "back o' Benachie" and in the Bog o' Gicht. The Gordons have furnished a ballad literature as rich if not quite so choice as that of the Douglasses themselves.

In the Highlands proper as also in the Western Isles from the 12th Century onwards a great mass of Poetry much of which has been lost was afloat among the Gaelic people of Scotland. The very nature of the Celt is poetic and their minds are full of it. Many of the powerful chiefs kept bards as professional family functionaries, but they finally disappeared as those who maintained them learned other ways, but the old traditional folk lore with its large poetical element was the dominant feature of their mental life and the fire-side customs of the people were the chief machinery of their preservation. The bardic schools of Ireland, between which and those of Scotland there was a close connection during the Gaelic supremacy in the Highlands and Islands, helped to keep the lamp of Gaelic learning aglow for centuries and traces of their influence are clearly discernable in the poetry of the Highlands. Many of the ballads are of much importance whether historical or mythical and cluster round the great families of the Lords of the Isles.

Argyll and the Ossianic traditions, most of them have been translated by eminent Gaelic scholars, many of them treat of feuds/

feuds and conflicts, others full of Celtic lore and superstition, but the great mass of them show the wealth of tenderness inherent in the Gaelic character and the capacity for emotion which renders the Gael susceptible to joy as well as to sorrow, sensitive to the humorous as well as to the pathetic aspect of life. The partiality of the Highlander for those compositions which contained the traditional history of their heroes and their exploits have been instrumental in moulding the intellectual life of the people - the things that never have happened outside the brain of the seer or seanachie, have had more influence on their lives, than the things which really did happen, because their truth though not literal on the surface came from the depths of human nature - a race of singers it was and still is, the structure of whose thought and speech has been build out of the precious stories of poetry and romance.

The Ballads relating to Fairies and other supernatural ideas are mostly of great poetic beauty. From these compositions we gain considerable information regarding the spiritual agents in which borderer and highlander alike believed, and at the mention of who's name or at his approach to the district in which they were supposed to be, he piously crossed himself and murmured a prayer to Mary Mother. These Ballads of Fairy Mythology are steeped in the elements of superstition, full of hobgoblins and dragons, brownies and bogles like "Tam o' Shanter" of later date, /

date, tales that have ceased to frighten the nursery and which we read with a smile, were once on a time the terror of grown men who loved and gloried in danger of a human form. The fairies have always been favourites of the poets who have heaped their flowers of fancy on the graves of the little elfin folk that used to trip the moonlit sward and bewitch the woodlands with their uncanny doings.

"Up the craggy mountain,
And down the rushy glen;
We dare not go a hunting,
For fear of little men.

Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping altogether;
Green jerkin, red cap
And white owl's feather."

Their strength was supposed to be prodigious, curiously disproportionate to their size, We almost imagine we can see them with their tricky malicious ways, but it is difficult at this time of day to understand the influence they held over the people. Though strange and unaccountable as it may seem, there are still a few living in the Highlands who believe in the fairies.

Then/

Then there were spells and charms for the winning of love and the slaking of revenge, lovers at parting exchange rings as in Hynd Horn, gifted with the property of revealing death or faithlessness.

"When your ring turns pale and wan

Then I'm in love wi' another man."

or as in Rose the Red and Lily Flower, it is the magic horn, to be blown when in danger, and whose notes can be heard at any distance, examples of dreams, curious mysteries and such like are endless. "The Efin-Knight", "Young Tamlane", "The Demon Lover" "Child Rowland" and many other similar ballads, were accepted not merely as poetic fables, but in full faith as a relation of actual facts.

me | x But the most famous inhabitant of Fairy Land was Thomas Learmonth of Erceldowie, ^{down} better known by his traditional name of Thomas the Rhymer, poet, prophet, and the beloved of the Queen of Elf-land, who alone of mortal men dared to kiss her lips and whose grey tower, still nods over the Leader at the Village of Earlston, regarded with superstitious awe by the natives of the district. As the story goes, Thomas as he lay stretched one summer day on Huntly bank within sight of the Gildon Hills, saw suddenly appear before him an apparition in the shape of a fair lady, who said that she was the Queen of Elf-land, that she had come to visit him, /

him, and if he but dared kiss her lips, she would be of his body, when Thomas answered quite fearless.

"Betide me weal, betide me woe,
That weird shall never danton me";
Syne he has kissed her rosy lips
All underneath the Eildon tree.

"Now ye maun go wi' me", she said,
True Thomas ye maun go wi' me;
And ye maun serve me seven years;
Thro' weal or woe, as may chance to be."

From that day for seven years, Thomas was seen no more among men. After that period he returned and scattered abroad prophecies of days of dool and woe for Scotland, and of the final Union of the two Crowns.

When he left Elf-land, he was bound to return at the pleasure of the Queen; she had pined for her favourite. One day Thomas was sitting in his tower, when a messenger burst in and told him that a doe and fawn of wonderful beauty were pacing without fear through the village. He knew the signal, immediately rose and followed the creatures into the forest, and was never again seen on earth. Such is the story. It is significant and bearing on our present paper, that the country of Thomas the Rhymer was also the home of a later and greater wizard, /

wizard, who wrought his spells over the whole district, and did for the ballads and prose legends of Scotland, what Burns achieved for her songs.

There was also the Moral and Satirical ballad - much of the contents of that pack is better forgotten - much even of what has been preserved might have been allowed to drop into oblivion without loss to posterity, and with gain to the character and reputation of the "good old times". The balladists - those of the early broad-sheets at least - could be gross on occasion, although it must be owned, not more gross than the dramatists of the Elizabethian and Restoration times, and even the novelists of a later period sometimes deigned to be. In particular they made the mistake of venerable date, and not quite unknown to this date, of confounding humour with coarseness - a humorous ballad is usually a thing to be fingered gingerly - yet many of them have embedded in them a rich and genuine vein of comic wit or broad fun which reflect more plainly and frankly perhaps, than any other department of our literature the customs, character and amusements of the commonality, and have exercised an important influence on the national poets and poetry of a later day.

Of the blending of the humorous with the romantic, there are many examples of pawky wit such as "The Piper of Kilbarchan", "The Blithsome Bridal" and best and most characteristic of all "Maggie Lauder".

There/

There one touches worthy of a comedy in "The Gaberlunzie Man"-
of the good wife's alternate blessing and banning, as she makes
her morning discoveries about the silly poor man she has lodged
over night.

"She gaed to the bed whair the beggar lay;
The strae was cauld, he was away;
She clapt her hands, cryed, "Dulefu' day"
For some of our gear will be gane."

Some ran to coffer and some to kist
But nought was stown, that could be mist
She danced her lane, cry'd "Praise be blest"
I've lodg'd a leal poor man.
Since naething awa, as we can learn
The kirk's to kirk, and milk to yearn,
Gae but the house, lass, and waken my bairn
And bid her come quickly ben".

The servant gaed where the dochter lay
The sheets were cauld she was away;
And fast to the goodwife did say
"She's aff wi" the Gaberlunzie man"!.
O fy gar ride and fy gar rin
And haste ye, find these traitors again
For she's be burnt, and he's be slain
The wearifu' gaberlunzie man."

Other excellent specimens of old Scottish humour have come down to us in ballad form, some of them made more familiar to our ears in modernized versions, in which along with the roughness much of the force and quaint drollery of the originals has been smoothed away.

Of such is "The Wyf of Auchtenmuchty" a Fife ballad, full of local colour and character. It is the progenitor of "John Grunlie", and gives us a lively series of pictures of the house wifery and the husbandry, as well as of the average human nature of the time to which it belongs. The Proverb "The more the haste the less the speed" has never been more humorously illustrated than with the troubles of the lazy gude-man who "weel can tipple oot a can and neither lovit hunger nor cauld" and who fancied he could more easily play the housewife's part.

"Then to the kirn that he did stour,
And jumbled at it, till he swat,
When he had jumblit, ane lang hour,
The sorrow crap of butter he gat;

Abeit nae butter he could get,
Yet he was cumbered wi' the kirn;
And syne he het the milk ower het,
That sorrow spark o'it wad yearn."

Of the same racy domestic type, are the still popular
"The Barrin' o' the Door" and "Hame cam oor Gudeman at e'en"

No essay on Scottish Ballads can omit noticing those associated with the Yarrow - for in the whole range of our lyrical literature, there is nothing finer - It is curious that all the ballads that have been written on the Yarrow are of a sorrowful character. Why is this? It is because of the melancholy events which have occurred on its banks and which inspired them, and of the lonely appearance which it presents. The whole district is strewn with the sites of those tragedies of far off years forgotten by history, but celebrated in song and tradition.

The best remembered ballad of the circle is the immortal "Dowie Dens". In it the song of the river has been wedded to its story "like perfect music into noble words". It commemorates a duel that as tradition says was fought between John Scott of Tushielaw and his brother-in-law Walter Scott of Thirlestane, in which the latter was slain. The commonly accepted version begins -

"Late at e'en drinking the wine,
 And ere the paid their lawing;
 They set a combat them between,
 To fight it in the dawing."

.....

"Four/

"Four has he hurt, and five has slain,
 On the bloody braes of Yarrow;
 Till a coward knight, came him behind,
 And ran his body thorough."

A ballad minstrel with a master's touch must have left us this wondrous picture of the quarrel, hot and sudden, of the challenge fiercely given and accepted, of the stubborn fight in which a single "noble brand" holds its own against nine, until the cruel brother comes behind that "comliest knight" and "runs his body thorough", of the yearning and waiting of the "winsome Marrow" with fear at her heart, filled with forebodings of evil

"O gentle wind that blaweth south,
 Frae where my love repaireth;
 Blaw me a kiss frae his dear mouth
 And tell me how he fareth".

Lastly, of the search "the bonnie forest thorough" till she finds the "ten slain men" and among them "the fairest rose was ever cropped on Yarrow".

"She kissed his cheek, she kaimed his hair,
 She searched his wounds a' thorough;
 She kissed him till her lips grew red,
 On the dowie howms o' Yarrow."

It/

It was these verses that suggested to Hamilton of Bangour, the exquisitely beautiful ballad beginning

"Busk ye, busk ye, my bonnie bonnie bride"

The fine old ballad entitled "Willie's drowned in Yarrow" refers to a different circumstance. It was a great favourite with Sir Walter Scott, and I need only mention the frequent references made by him, the Ettrick Shepherd and other Scottish Poets to the same subject. Wordsworth's sympathy with and appreciation of our Scottish ballad and song lore is shown in several of his poems - "Yarrow Unvisited", "Yarrow Visited" and "Yarrow Revisited" are instances in point.

I would like also to notice the "Jacobite Minstrelsy" which may be said to date from the Revolution of 1688. From that time forward every event which relates to the exiled family of Stuart is celebrated in ballads and ditties. It was never more copious or more spirited than in dealing with the Rebellion of 1745. This last brave attempt of the banished dynasty seemed to have called forth corresponding efforts from the Poets, and Charles Edward was welcomed with strains of wonderful lyric beauty, which endeavoured to win over adherents to the Prince, and then once more when all was lost, they followed his departure with mournful airs of despairing farewell.

"He went" writes Lord Stanhope, "but not with him departed his remembrance from the Highlanders, his name continues enshrined in/
in/

in their hearts and familiar to their tongues, their plaintive ditties resounding with his exploits, and inviting his return, all declare themselves ready to risk life and fortune for his cause and yield to the passionate devotion to Prince Charlie". Song and music have given the Stuart cause its revenge against fortune, and Prince Charlie and not Cumberland will remain for all time the hero of the cycle of song that commemorates the last romantic episode in our domestic annals - which ever side had the better in the sword play, there is no doubt which has won the triumph in the piping. Such Jacobite lays as "Carle an' the King Come", "The Battle of Sheriffmuir", "The White Cocade", "Waes me for Prince Charlie" and "Will ye no come back again", have always been and always will be great favourites with the people, but this series of minstrelsy should more properly be classed with the Songs of Scotland rather than Ballads, and I only mention them here in passing, as it would be wrong had I omitted to notice them at all.

Having tried to acquaint you with a few of the characteristics of our Scottish Ballads, I would now briefly notice their history which dates back to the expulsion of the Danes and the introduction of the English language into Scotland.

The oldest examples which have been handed down to us are the Chronicles of Wyntoun and Fordun written about the beginning of the 14th Century, then follow Barbour, Blind Harry, Dunbar, Gavin/

Gavin Douglas, and James I, which brings us down to the invention of printing. In England and elsewhere the invention of printing was fatal to traditional poetry, but in Scotland on the contrary the 16th Century seems to have been its golden age. It was long before improvements could force their way into the remote recesses of the Mountains and the poetry of the period sets before us a living picture of a time full of romantic incidents and materials for poetry. Then came the Reformation Era and with it a new order of things which for a time did not go well with ballad-making. Border feud and skirmish was well nigh past and industry and knowledge making progress. As in England so also in Scotland the spirit of Puritanism was a deadly foe to all kinds of minstrelsy.

The Calvinistic ministers who after the Reformation exercised a powerful influence were bitterly opposed to songs and music of every shape, and even banished the organs, those "Kists o' whistles" as they called them, from the churches, as savouring too much of profane minstrelsy, but they did not wipe out original sin or alter human nature, and though the greater part of the nation accorded in the main with their principles, it could not give up its old songs and ballads even in obedience to the Church and the Reformers were driven to the most absurd straits to gain their ends. They frequently appropriated the popular tunes and converted them to the use of the Church service, often too parodying/

parodying the words in a religious sense with the most comical effect. The "Gude and Godlie Ballates" of the Wedderburns and other zealous Reformers are only remembered now by the antiquary - not because they were spiritual or written by worthy men with good intent - for our Scottish Psalms, sung to their traditional melodies, touch a deeper chord in the natural breast than even the ballads - but because they lacked the sap of life, the beauty and the passion of nature's own teaching, which gives immortality to song.

Then came the Cavaliers and Covenanters who each had their own bards to tell of the tragic occurrences of the civil and religious wars of the 17th Century. Many of these ballads though not of a high poetical order, and wanting in those touches of grace and tenderness and kindly humour that somehow accompany the very roughest of the earlier ballads - are at least historically interesting as illustrations of the wild forces which were then at strife and struggling for the mastery.

With the Union of the Crowns the mood and condition of the Nation changed, and one stream of Scottish romance and song rowd^{an}ry, as after this we hardly meet with a ballad having the antique ring about it. The "end of the auld sang" of the Scottish Parliament was also the end of the genuine ballad. As I have already mentioned there was an outburst of National feeling expressed in song and music over the Jacobite risings of the 18th Century, but/

but the expression was lyrical not narrative.

Allan Ramsay rose like a star at its beginning and Burns shone out gloriously at its close, leaving us with a heritage of song which can never die.

A word now in conclusion on the general characteristics of Scottish as compared with English ballads. The English have a series of ballads which stands by itself and form a complete and authentic group. I refer to those of which Robin Hood, the bold, generous and courteous outlaw, living under the greenwood tree with his merry men, taking from the rich and giving to the poor, is the hero; no portion of popular English poetry is more noteworthy; they took a thorough possession of the mind of the lower orders, among whom their popularity existed for six hundred years, and even yet survives in all sorts of nicknames and sayings. A century and a half ago they were to be found in every pedlar's pack for literally the price of an old song, but now if a single broad sheet of the originals of them were to turn up, it would fetch much more than its weight in gold.

The words of Drayton the poet, made 250 years ago, are to this day true in substance

"In this our spacious isle, I think there is not one,
But he hath heard some talk of Robin Hood and Little John;
And to the end of time, the tale shall ne'er be done,
Of Scarlock, George a Green, and Much the Miller's son;
Of Tuck the Merry Friar, which many a sermon made,
In praise of Robin Hood, his outlaws and their trade".

These Robin Hood ballads of England answer to the Border or freebooter ballads of Scotland, only the former are joyous, fresh and healthy, while the latter are wild and tragic. Taken together and read with what we know from other sources, they make up one of the fiercest pictures that a Christian Kingdom has ever presented, a true one alas! as regards Scotland, for many centuries exposed as it was to the ills consequent upon a dependant King, powerless laws, unextinguishable clan and border feuds. But apart from these which form a group by themselves, no other country but our own offers such scope for the collector of old poetry, its external features as a

"Land of brown heath, and shaggy wood.

Land of the mountain, and the flood:"

has always exercised a magical attraction over its people, and has fostered in them a deep vein of sentiment and romance, which has been fruitful of popular songs and ballads.

The English ballad generally begins with a formal, rather pompous address bespeaking the interest of the bystanders as

"Sittith all still, and hearkeneth to me"

or

Lithe and listen lordlings all"

and then passes on to the subject which is related sometimes at extraordinary length, while the Scottish have no affectedness in them, but begin to the subject at once and deals with it thoroughly/

thoroughly to the end. In ready wit and humour the English ballads are decidedly superior, but in simplicity and happy delineation of character the ballads of Scotland are second to none of any other nation. Another peculiarity of the Scottish ballads is, that each poem is strictly localized; this it is which endears our songs to all native hearts, and even in the case of strangers has made the whole of Scotland as it were classic ground.

One other charm of Scottish popular poetry may be noticed, it is the last I mention - namely the way in which it has gone hand in hand with their melodies; these airs full of melodious passion, especially of a sad kind, are often in intimate accordance with the words of the song. Thus music and poetry have ministered each to each, and wedded to touching airs the popular poetry of Scotland has prolonged its life, has preserved and probably will continue to keep a firm hold on the national mind.

It is a far cry from Blind Harry the Minstrel to Harry Lauder the Music Hall singer, men of the same calling and profession, catering for the amusement and entertainment of the public in their generations. The whirlygig of time has brought tremendous changes between their epochs, but by a strange fatality, the trend of modern life and experience shows, that while the songs of the popular music hall singers of to-day, and even the singer himself, will in all probability be forgotten in the course of/

of a few decades, the songs of the blind minstrel and his successors have come down to us through the centuries, and will continue to do so, as long as verse has power to move the heart of man.

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George Hargrave